

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.com

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Nov. 30, 2004

1. Shotgun Deer Season – by Joe Wilkinson [hold story until Dec. 2]
2. Deer Hunters Preparing for Shotgun Seasons
3. Holiday Spirit Hits Deer Hunters
4. Mountain Lions in Iowa Topic of DNR Meetings
5. CRP Buffer and Hardwood Plantings Maximize Environmental and Financial Benefits

[Hold this story until Dec. 2]

SHOTGUN DEER SEASON

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Heading into the woods this weekend, Iowa's shotgun deer hunters face a variety of opportunities. Most of them point to another record deer harvest this season.

Besides the traditional statewide, any-sex shotgun deer license that 135,000 or more of us will buy, 84,000 *antlerless* deer tags...available for muzzleloader, bow and now shotgun seasons...point toward hunters eclipsing the overall 2003-04 mark of more than 186,000 deer taken. Most of those whitetails are killed during the state's two shotgun seasons; December 4-8 and 11-19. The anticipated harvest should help dial down numbers in areas with too many deer. This year's estimated population is about the same as last year's. However, hunters took more fawn-producing does than bucks last year. Another year of that should get us around the corner, to where deer numbers begin dipping.

That's been a hard sell to many hunters who grew up in the 'any buck before a doe' tradition. However, with hunters as Iowa's primary deer management tool, it is still stressed. "The increased antlerless tags will allow us to increase the doe harvest, particularly in the eastern and southern parts of the state," emphasized Willie Suchy, deer research biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. "I'd recommend for shotgun hunters in a party with antlerless tags available for that county; to shoot your does first. Then be selective with the bucks you take, to fill out your tags."

Iowa law allows ‘party hunting’ in the shotgun seasons, in which one hunter can tag a deer shot by another in his group; if done within 15 minutes and before the deer is moved. Suchy says that if more does are taken, instead of small bucks, those fork-to-basket sized racks will be much more impressive as the deer beneath them approach three, four or five years of age.

While party hunts usually cover the same areas, a scouting trip will update the ‘lay of the land’. Around our Delaware County area, for instance, a thickly wooded creek bed has been dammed into a pond. That’s going to alter deer escape routes somewhat. Corn and hay rotations; especially with the last of the corn coming out within the last week will mean some other adjustments.

Other than that, Iowa’s party hunting system works well. “Our hunters are real effective,” says Suchy. “They have figured out, through the traditional drives, watching the wind and where the crops were, how to push deer to where they have a good chance of harvesting them.” At the same time, hunters should not to follow traditional drives blindly. “The wind is your key,” advises Suchy. “Despite what *you* want them to do, deer will try to escape into or ‘across’ the wind, whenever possible.” That becomes apparent on a mild day, for instance, with a south or southeast wind in place of the normally prevalent west or north winds of December. Last year, deer let our drivers walk right past, then ran behind us, on an east-to-west drive with the wind at our backs instead of in our faces.

Pay attention to those non-traditional areas, too; field corners, CRP plots or brushy fence rows. “Deer are very adaptable,” says Suchy. “If we hunt the same timber over and over again, deer can sometimes pattern us. Pay attention to those small places; CRP fields, the grassy draws.” Those small areas are often easy to reach and take only a few minutes to cover, too.

Don’t Wait Until Friday

Hunters should expect long lines if they wait until Friday to pick up their deer licenses. As of Monday, less than half of the 135,000 any deer licenses have been sold. A resident deer license costs \$26. Hunters must also have a hunting license (\$17.50) and pay the habitat fee (\$8.50), if normally required.

County Tags Going Fast

This year, another 30,000 antlerless tags are available on a county-by-county basis. As the shotgun seasons approached, though, the choices were dropping. Earlier this week, 43 counties had sold their allotments. Most, though, were in north, central, and western counties. Most counties in the south, southeast and northeast parts of the state, areas with higher deer counts had higher quotas established and still had licenses available. Your first antlerless tag is \$26. Each subsequent tag, regardless of the season, costs \$11. The county quotas, and tags remaining, can be found on the DNR website www.iowadnr.com. From there, in the left margins, click on *Hunting Information*, then *availability of limited quota licenses*, then *resident antlerless deer by county*.

Hunters can also take advantage of the late season hunt, January 11-23, 2005. Extended statewide this year, it also extends over two weekends. It is designed to take antlerless deer only.

Nonresidents who want to take an antlerless deer can buy a Holiday Deer Season license for \$50.50, providing nonresident quotas have not filled. That's considerably less than the high-demand 'any sex' tag. The December 24-January 2 dates exclude shotgun hunters, but do offer muzzleloading or bow hunting, for instance, for family members back in Iowa over the holidays.

Aerial Maps Offer Birds-Eye View

This year, one of your most valuable hunting tools is your computer. Aerial photographs are available; to coordinate 'who goes where' and avoid confusion and delays while misplaced hunters are located.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources website (www.iowadnr.com) offers a category (main page, left margin) called Mapping (GIS Interactive), from which you can link to a variety of maps and photos for a variety of uses. I found the Iowa Geographic Image Map Server; <http://ortho.gis.iastate.edu> as my best bet, clicking on Digital Orthophoto Quad (DOQ) and scrolling/recentering/clicking across the state to our area. Then, as I zoom in, the sketchy map is replaced by aerial shots; so close I can identify smaller outbuildings and waterways around the farm.

With a couple new hunters in the group this year, it should be valuable. Instead of telling one to 'walk to the second finger of timber and set up near the ravine where we shot that big doe two years ago,' we'll simply point to where he is now and where he needs to be.

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DEER HUNTERS PREPARING FOR SHOTGUN SEASONS

DES MOINES – The first of two statewide shotgun deer seasons opens Dec. 4 and more than 135,000 hunters are expected to participate during the next few weeks. Unlike the bow and muzzleloader deer hunters who use more of a sit and wait approach, shotgun hunters tend to hunt in groups with some hunters standing at one end of a timber and the rest of the hunters driving the deer toward them.

"The opening of deer season can get hunters excited like few other seasons," said Rod Slings, recreation safety program supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "For some it's the camaraderie and for others it's the excitement of the hunt. There are a lot of factors that make deer season special for families across the state."

Slings said hunters should make a plan outlining each person's role and responsibility during the hunt. The plan would spell out where each hunter is at all times and explains where they are hunting and when they will return. A copy of the plan should be left with someone not going on the hunt.

"The ultimate goal is an enjoyable hunt for all hunters to return home safe at the end of the day," he said. "We need to repeat that message to get through the 'have to fill my tag' mentality in many hunting groups."

Slings said problems start when a hunter does not follow the hunt plan and are in the timber and no one else knows where they are. Another common source of injuries is a hunter taking an ill-advised shot.

"Shooting at a running deer is an injury waiting to happen. Hunters need to look past their target to see what is beyond it. They can get so focussed on the deer that they don't see anything else," he said.

Other safety factors include wearing plenty of the required blaze orange and checking with the landowner to see if any other hunters have permission to hunt the property and if so, when.

"Take a look at your blaze orange clothing. If it's old and faded, it's not doing its job, which is making you visible in the timber. Investing in new blaze orange is a small price for some peace of mind," Slings said.

The first shotgun season is Dec. 4 through 8 and the second season is Dec. 11 through 19. Last year, 15 hunters were injured during Iowa's two shotgun deer seasons. There were no fatalities.

For more information, contact Slings at 515-281-8652.

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HOLIDAY SPIRIT HITS DEER HUNTERS

DES MOINES - Iowa deer hunters are demonstrating the holiday spirit this year by donating more deer to needy families and donating more money to pay venison processing costs, according to the DNR.

In its second year, Help Us Stop Hunger (HUSH), and an abundance of deer permits, are giving hunters the opportunity to harvest more deer than ever and benefit many more Iowans, said Ross Harrison, DNR's HUSH coordinator.

“Virtually everyone feels we need to reduce the deer population in this state,” said Harrison. The DNR is offering 34,000 additional doe permits over last year’s record-setting season, and Harrison said the HUSH program offers hunters an the ideal outlet for deer they may want to shoot, but not take home. This season, more hunters are donating deer and money to the effort than last year.

“Any hunter in any season can donate any deer to HUSH,” he said. “However, they can only donate HUSH deer to any of the 30 lockers participating in the program. We do not have enough money to go statewide to pay for venison processing. We are struggling to raise the money for our 2,000-deer goal for just the central part of the state.” Last year, hunters donated 1,600 deer.

Paying only the cost of their regular deer license, a hunter can drop off field dressed deer at a participating locker. The list of lockers can be found at www.iowahush.com. Harrison said it costs HUSH \$55 per deer for processing. He said the Food Bank of Iowa handles the payments, the venison pick-up from the locker and delivery to its social service agencies that supply the needy with the meat. For its work, the Food Bank receives \$5 per deer.

“Our goal is to raise \$120,000 in donations from auto insurance companies, conservation organizations, and Iowa businesses, and we are only about half-way there for this season. A big boost comes from deer hunter donations. Hunters are asked if they want to donate \$5 to HUSH when they buy their deer permit. So far this year, about 3,000 deer hunters have given nearly \$15,000 to HUSH,” said Harrison.

He noted other big contributors to HUSH as the Iowa Farm Bureau, Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance, Des Moines Claim Managers Council, Hunter Specialties of Cedar Rapids and Whitetails Unlimited. Last year the legislature appropriated \$17,000 to HUSH and Harrison is hopeful it will increase the amount next year.

“With sufficient funding, a statewide HUSH program could account for around 5,000 deer removed from the herd and given to those who really need this excellent meat at their dinner tables. It would cost only about \$300,000 to produce the 1 million meals of venison this would provide,” he said.

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MOUNTAIN LIONS IN IOWA TOPIC OF DNR MEETINGS

CLEAR LAKE – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has scheduled two public discussions on the presence of mountain lions in Iowa.

The meetings are scheduled for 2 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 5 at the nature center near New Hampton, and for 7 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 7 at the Fisher Community Center in Marshalltown. The meetings are open to the public.

There has been a lot of news and discussion about a mountain lion captured on film by a trail camera near Albion in Marshall County in October.

Ron Andrews, state fur-bearer biologist for the Iowa DNR will present the history and biology of mountain lions and discuss the confirmed lion sightings in Iowa. He will also talk about things people can do if they think they see a lion that could help confirm their belief.

“We emphasize the DNR did not release these lions in Iowa,” Andrews said.

For more information, contact Andrews at 641-357-3517.

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CRP BUFFER AND HARDWOOD PLANTINGS MAXIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL AND FINANCIAL BENEFITS

In Iowa, there has been a strong relationship between the people and the land. Over the last few years Iowans have shown a greater concern for the quality of their environment and their natural resources. This concern is especially strong in regards to water quality.

There are two ongoing programs through the United States Department of Agriculture that provide landowners an opportunity to enhance the quality of their property and the quality of the water that leaves their property by planting woody vegetation next to streams and/or rivers. These programs are the Conservation Reserve Program's (CRP) Forested Riparian Buffer Program and Bottomland Hardwood Initiative.

Properly located tree, shrub and grass buffers that extend 180 feet from stream banks and/or large scale bottomland tree plantings next to water bodies can reduce soil erosion and moving contaminants, increase wildlife habitat, and improve water quality.

To qualify for the Conservation Reserve Riparian Buffer Program a landowner must own pasture or cropland immediately adjacent to a perennial creek or river. If the property qualifies, landowners are reimbursed 90 percent of their establishment costs. They also receive a \$150 per acre sign-up bonus and an annual rental payment for each acre in the program for a period of 15 years. Rental rates on marginal pasture are \$84 an acre. Cropland rental rates vary from \$100 to \$180 per acre.

“The forested riparian buffer is the widest buffer allowed under the Conservation Reserve Program rules and allows a landowner to get a third more area enrolled in the CRP than any other buffer. This maximizes their payment and the environmental benefits of their buffer,” said Paul Tauke, forestry supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

To qualify for the Bottomland Hardwood Initiative a landowner must own cropland that is within the 100-year flood plain of a river or stream. If the property qualifies for the program landowners receive 50 percent cost-share for the establishment of trees, plus an annual payment for 14 to 15 years.

Bottomland hardwood tree planting also has economic benefits to Iowa landowners. According to Tauke, landowners can count on harvesting between \$4,500 to \$6,000 dollars of timber per acre in roughly 50 years.

“Planting 20 acres in bottomland hardwoods would generate an income of \$117,000 to \$156,000 when timber prices and CRP benefits are combined. This means that at the same time you are working to improve water quality, prevent erosion, and provide improved wildlife habitat, you are also providing a future source of revenue for yourself or your children,” Tauke said.

For more information on forested riparian buffers and the Bottomland Hardwood Initiative go to www.iowatreeplanting.com , or contact Forestry Supervisor, Paul Tauke at 515/242-6898 or paul.tauke@dnr.state.ia.us . For more information on the continuous CRP contact your county Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation office.

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